

Intricacies Of Love by **HanShaped**

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Summary: A short and fluffy two-shot about discussing the idea of love and how expressing it is not always easy.

1. I Know

A/N: It's a repost of a fanfic published on Ao3 on November 19th, 2017.

It's not that long, but really fluffy and hopefully you'll like it.

I tried to toy a bit with a few ideas, like the fact that not all people are good at voiceing their feelings, as well as the iconic "I love you—I know" dialogue.

That's how this story was born.

I hope everyone is in character and stuff.

Enjoy!

Oh, and, yeah, a bunch of Star Wars references ahead, because I couldn't help myself.

(I know that there are already many fics using them, but it just makes so much sense when it comes to those characters and the time period.)

Part 1: I Know

Hawkins, August 1985

It was one of those lazy summer afternoons, when Hopper was working late, and the Byers enjoyed their "family day". That was how Will had dubbed it, and it often consisted of the family trip or some quality time spent at home. Even though there were moments when Will would prefer to meet with his friends rather than constantly be with his family, upon seeing how happy it made his mom and Jonathan, he couldn't say no. And with Dustin, Lucas and Max having a yet another adventure, accompanied by Steve Harrington (Mike was still amazed why the teenager was spending so much time with his friends), Mike and El found themselves in the Hopper's cabin, laying on the couch and watching TV.

It was El's turn to choose and she decided on rewatching the Star Wars trilogy. She had already seen it, as those had been ones of the

first films Mike had showed her, but she had quickly taken a liking in the series. Mike suspected that it was mainly because there was a character who could do things like she did and overcame all obstacles to become a hero, and she probably identified with him a lot. Besides, Mike was a big fan of those films himself, so he hadn't objected. And it was always nice to just sit on the couch and stuff your mouth with popcorn, watching epic space battles on the TV screen, especially if it meant that he could be close to El.

They were currently on the Episode V. Mike still considered it as the best part, even though Dustin always defended two other films, acknowledging the importance of *A New Hope* in establishing that incredible world and great characters, as well as the epic victory over the Galactic Empire in *Return of the Jedi*. However, it was *Empire Strikes Back* that raised the stakes and showed how much of a threat the Empire really was, not to mention a really compelling love story in the background (not that Mike would admit it to his friends). That was why he couldn't help but enjoy that one the most.

They eventually reached the iconic scene of the carbonite freezing. Mike liked it, but ever since El had walked into his life and disappeared almost as quickly, watching it was... weird. He guessed the situation felt familiar, and he couldn't stop shivers from running down his spine. The princess on the screen looked nearly as helpless as he must have back then.

Mike shook his head, trying to chase away those dark thoughts. It had happened a long time ago, and El was there, with him. There was nothing to worry about. Despite that reassurance, he had to glance at her, cuddled close to him, just to make sure she's right beside him, alive and well. Thanks to that, a bewildered expression on her face didn't escape his notice.

"Love...", she echoed thoughtfully, looking away from the screen. "What's love?," she asked, her warm curious eyes locked on his face, as she carefully studied his expression.

Mike froze. It wasn't that he was surprised to hear that one particular question; he'd always known that that day would eventually come. However, he hadn't seen it coming *now*, as they had already watched the film, and back then El had just furrowed her eyebrows and hadn't

asked any questions.

He looked away, a bit flustered, trying to come up with a bearably coherent answer, but then he remembered. "You already asked Mrs. Byers that the other day," he pointed out, eyeing her curiously.

She had, and Mike felt bad about overhearing that conversation, but there's only so much one could do, having a house as small as the Byers'. So, with El and Will's mom in the kitchen, and Will and him discussing a new campaign in the living room, he could have heard almost everything. He had hard time trying to force his heart to beat normally after getting to know about the subject that El had brought up.

"Yes." She nodded, apparently not bothered by him admitting to hearing that. She was silent for a few moments, as if waiting for his answer. Upon seeing his still puzzled expression, she sighed, grabbing and squeezing his hand lightly. "I want to know what *you* think," she clarified patiently.

Mike gulped, his eyes fixated back on the TV screen. However, as much as he wanted to, he could hardly register what was happening in the film right now, even though he had already known it practically by heart. His cheeks were warmer with every passing moment, as though El's close look had a magical power to make him feel even more awkward.

He was aware that she would question him further, and he could see her lips slowly parting. Luckily, he found his voice quickly enough. "Well, love...", he started hesitantly, soon stopping short. Love was an idea he could grasp, putting it into words, however, was quite a difficult task. He doubted his answer would be in any way satisfying, and somehow the fact that it was El who had asked him that in the first place made it all only more confusing.

Mike closed his eyes, looking for words that would both be easily understandable for El (at times, even despite her ever-growing vocabulary, she felt more comfortable with using the very few words she knew best) and properly convey the great meaning of that word. "Love is like... it is like a... a very big promise," he finally decided, well-aware of the importance of the word "promise" for both of them.

"When there's someone you not only will do anything for, but you can't imagine your life without that person..."

"Someone more than a friend?," El inquired, tilting her head to the side.

Mike nodded, his fingers toying with her smaller ones. "Yeah. Someone very special, who makes you feel... yourself." He still avoided her eyes, afraid that his words might've sounded awfully cliché. "Who makes you feel accepted," he continued a bit shyly. "Someone who makes you feel home," he concluded, wincing nonetheless.

He had never felt particularly good about discussing anything connected with feelings. Their irrationality never ceased to confuse him and he had trouble with talking about his emotions. Because of that, he feared that the explanation he had offered El was rather simple, not really capturing the intricacies of the idea. His anxiety only grew, as she remained quiet, her expression still inquisitive, but calm nevertheless. Briefly, Mike felt like disappearing, overwhelmed by embarrassment.

However, El's soft voice was what brought his attention back to her face. "Mike." She looked intently into his eyes, reaching for his second hand, which was trembling slightly. "I love you." Even though her statement was quiet, it didn't lack any conviction. With her gaze firm, yet loving, there was no doubt that she meant exactly what she had just said.

For a moment, Mike thought his heart stopped beating and his lungs ceased to function properly. All he could do was to look into those chocolate eyes, filled with tenderness and the very same feeling she'd just expressed. He hadn't thought about it yet—well, he had, but never using the L word. It was just... so much. He was barely fourteen, and not among people understanding their emotions. He didn't feel ready for that.

He felt a lump forming in his throat. His voice was nowhere to be found, and he was afraid that his lack of response might hurt her feelings. Despite turmoil that his mind was in, he tried to come up with something to say. Well, he knew what he *should* say, but

somehow those words seemed so big—so serious. A part of him was aware that it was exactly how he felt, and yet it managed to frighten him. It was all happening so quickly.

"El, I..." He hated how his voice was cracking. Although his mouth remained opened, no more words came out.

Mike was furious at himself. He cared about her more than he could ever put it into words, so why it was so difficult for him to actually voice it. He gritted his teeth, wanting to slap himself; maybe that would help him to gather his bearings.

However, before he could do anything, he felt a light touch of velvety fingertips on his cheek. "Mike." Once again she called his name, forcing him to look into her eyes. He could never expect that her saying his name would be so soothing and grounding, as if with that one word she was bringing him from the darkness of his mind back to reality. "I know," she stated intently, corners of her lips rising in an affectionate smile.

He stared at her incredulously for a few seconds. Her statement took him aback, and yet thanks to it he could breathe again. Although her powers were no secret to him, he still found it amazing how easily she read him sometimes, without the need to use any words. It was one of many reasons why he adored her so much.

Mike couldn't help but mirror her smile, as he slowly leaned in. Without breaking eye-contact, he closed the distance between them and kissed her gently, his arms wrapping around her. Their kiss was quick to end, but they stayed close, their foreheads touching, seemingly lost in each other.

Even though Mike still wasn't ready to voice what he felt, he knew that it would eventually happen. The day would come and he would say it.

I love you, too, El.

2. I Love You, Too

A/N: It's a repost of a fanfic published on Ao3 on November 25th, 2017.

It's a teeth-rotting fluff. You have been warned!

And the moment finally came :D

I've been torn between which setting to choose, but I've eventually decided on the one you'll about to see ;)

Heavily inspired by Ed Sheeran's Perfect (since it's so much Mileven song).

And, yeah, strongly implied Jopper (I couldn't help myself) ahead!

(Plus, references to Every Breath You Take and Labyrinth ;))

Part 2: I Love You, Too

Hawkins, July 1986

The last year had been even more eventful than the previous one, even though Mike had hardly believed that could be possible. But if there was anything he had learnt since that fateful week of November 1983, it was that trying to predict the future—in the end—was utterly senseless. Therefore, he had to admit that nothing had been really surprising him anymore.

Actually, he had trouble recalling how their lives had looked before Christmas of 1985, when that big peculiar group of people, who had bonded with one another while fighting monsters from another dimension, had finally felt almost like a real family, mostly because of the huge Christmas Party at the Byers'. Mike still had no idea how so many people could have fit into such a small house for it still not to feel too crowded. Counting the number of people who had showed up had come out to be a very difficult task, and he had quickly gave up.

Somehow, with a few more tables and a majority of furniture moved away from the living room, all of the guest had sit together, eating, chatting, and exchanging gifts. It had been a really pleasant evening, and, as it had turned out, it had held quite a few surprises, one of them being an official shift in Mrs. Byers and Chief's relationship. It hadn't been unexpected (truthfully, it'd been longed-for), but everyone had still been amazed by the two of them so openly showing each other affection.

Besides, it had proved to bring many groundbreaking changes to their lives. Hopper and El had practically been living with the Byers for the last few months (or at least spending the vast majority of time there), and with Jonathan leaving for NYU in the fall, their moving in there was certainly happening sooner than later. El herself was thrilled at the perspective of having siblings—brothers, nonetheless—and very glad to see Hopper so happy.

For her, though, that merge of their families into one hadn't been the only great shift, as the beginning of a new year had marked a start of school for her. She had been very enthusiastic, even if a little worried, and enjoyed every second of it. Despite not fitting in that well with other kids from the town, the group of her closest friends had been enough for her not to feel like an outcast. Mike knew that she relished the feeling of normalcy that accompanied going to school.

On top of that, they could finally spend more time together. Attending a majority of the same classes (Mike had suspected that Chief had had something to do with that), they had become almost inseparable at school, spending breaks with the rest of the party or just by themselves. Of course, everyone had been wondering who the new mysterious girl had been and why she had been hanging out only with the losers (well, maybe except Dustin, who was getting increasingly more popular), but Mike hardly thought about it.

Right now, however, that the summer had started, Mike and El could meet anywhere they wanted to, away from prying eyes. That one particular afternoon, they sat on the cabin's porch, talking, laughing, and listening to one of the mixtapes, which El had gotten from Jonathan, on her new radio. He had been very happy to introduce her to the "real music", as he called it, but Mike could swear he had

heard a few more Nancy-like choices on it as well. And the incredible joy on El's face when she had ripped away the wrapping paper was hard to forget (the only moment of the Christmas Party he cherished more was the exchange of gifts between just the two of them).

It was the very beginning of July and every member of the party was very excited about the summer break, especially El, since those were her first holidays ever. She was still a bit confused what all the fuss was about, but she slowly started to understand the joy of not having to go to school everyday. Furthermore, she had already told Mike about some of her summer plans, including taking him to the theater to see *Labyrinth*, which she was eagerly looking forward to.

Mike smiled at the thought. Last year, it had been beyond their imagination for her to just casually hang out in town with her friends. In spite of her gradually widening freedom, there had been many things she couldn't do, and her life had still been far from normal. Now, however, she was going where she wanted to (most of the time after getting Hopper's approval, but... not always) and doing whatever she wished for.

Watching her enjoying that nearly unlimited freedom was one of the most fascinating things Mike had ever done. Hadn't he known better, he would've had hard time recognising the girl sitting next to him. With her expression serene and a cheerful smile on her rosy lips, she looked just like a normal fifteen-year-old, as if she had never experienced any of the nightmares that constantly haunted her.

Her cute curly hair were significantly longer, reaching past her shoulders and jumping freely every time she was laughing. She was wearing a pretty floral dress— *her own*, bought *specifically* for her— with short sleeves and a full bottom. Nancy had told him that when El had stepped out of the dressing room that day, she had looked as brightly as though she'd been about to buy a diamond ring, not just a simple dress. Max mocked her a bit about how girly she looked, even if it was all light-hearted. In return, El didn't hesitate to point out that embracing her girly side made her feel good and Max should try it one day (a conversation usually ended up with the red head sticking out her tongue or rolling her eyes, but with a wide grin brightening her face up).

"Mike." El's voice brought him back to reality. Apparently, he was staring at her longer than he thought. She eyed him questioningly, and for a moment he felt like he was missing something very important. "It's *our* song," she declared seriously, although he could see a glint of excitement in her eyes.

And, true to her words, the first chords of *Every Breath You Take* by The Police filled the air around them. El was promptly on her feet, reaching a hand in his direction with a playful smile. Soon, Mike found himself being pulled into the middle of a small clearing just before the cabin, and he should have seen that coming. El was a fast learner, and it didn't apply only to reading or skating, so it hadn't taken her long to master a wide variety of dance moves alongside Dustin (they had been stealing every party they'd been to since then). Her enthusiasm for dancing, as contagious as it was, had affected him a little, but his abilities were a far cry from being in any way impressive. Despite that, he could do everything just to see her smile, and that included making a fool of himself in front of her and their friends.

Now, however, that no one was watching them, he felt more at ease, swinging slowly to the rhythm of the song. His arms wrapped around El's waist, and he brought her closer, her breath ghosting over his face. Moments such like this one were those he treasured the most—when he was so close to her, sinking in those beautiful chocolate eyes, with no one else who could interrupt them. In those moments it felt like she was his whole world. And, well, she truly was.

"I used to hate that song," Mike confessed casually when the first refrain began.

El tilted her head to the side, looking at him curiously, with her brows a bit furrowed. He guessed that he had caught her off guard with that statement.

"I mean, if you listen closely to the lyrics, it's... creepy," he explained cautiously, trying to find proper words.

"I know," she admitted lightly, a small smirk adorning her lips. "But now it is your favourite," she said a bit mockingly, with a knowing look, her tone playful.

"One of my favourites," he corrected her pointedly, even though part of him knew all too well that she was essentially right. Not that he would ever admit it to the rest of the party, of course.

El just smiled broadly in response, obviously not taken in by his denial, and went back to swaying to the music, her arms thrown around his neck. Her fingers played with a few strands of his hair, but he didn't mind (it was actually really soothing if he was to be honest with himself). With her eyes almost closed and a relaxed smile, she looked like an angel. Mike couldn't believe that such a wonderful creature would ever love a loser like him. She was *perfect*, and in spite of it she had chosen him of all great people around them.

He had no idea what had gotten into him, but words left his throat before any doubting thoughts could stop them. "I love you, El." His voice was so quiet, that wasn't she so close she wouldn't have heard him at all.

But she had. Her face immediately brightened up, and Mike could swear he had never seen anyone looking at someone else with as much affection as she did. He was overwhelmed both by her reaction and by his own words. Although he thought he was about to panic, somehow what he actually felt was complete calmness, filling his heart. As if he had finally understood something, all doubts that he had ever had now forgotten.

Mike couldn't stop a vibrant smile from spreading on his lips, his eyes stinging slightly, as tears of pure joy slowly started to gather in their corners. "I love you, too," he repeated, louder this time, completely mesmerised by her eyes.

El chuckled warm-heartedly, her cheeks reddening slightly, but she held his gaze. "I know," she reaffirmed, smiling knowingly.

It couldn't be more than a few seconds, even if they felt like hours, before she leaned in and kissed him sweetly. He was quick to return the kiss, still amazed by what had just happened. It had been one of many intimate moments they had shared over the last year and a half, so what had made him say that now?

Even though that question bugged him, he couldn't care less about

the answer at the moment. Having that incredible girl in his arms, he felt like everything was falling into place. With his heart racing, but so amazingly light, he didn't want to waste even a split second to overthink it.